IOANA IERONIM

THE LENS OF A FLAME



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I was just passing and you just said
one of these things
one of these things

or some god playful mischievous
frolicking melancholy
spoke through you – and went

here is this flame, flickering now
and its reflections
tangere - noli me tangere, it says

and I let it have its way, I listen from far and near
and try to translate why this voice – disembodied
and then embodied in so many things

I was just passing and you just said
one of these things
one of these things

maybe like boys in your street
to a girl passing by
on a Sunday afternoon

*

my heart, all of me, this tree
turning its leaves
one by one in the wind

fluttering rustling with the call
of your closed lips

mere light can move it
a touch of light
can make it sing

the shell of our lives capturing
the tatters of a song
: a torn veil, the unraveled loincloth
of a wandering god

these sharp caressing tatters
tongues
of a song

*

who are you on that shore?
who am I on this?
a stone each of us? a tree?

the sun rises from that shore
and sets on this one –
it did yesterday
and tomorrow it will

who are you on that bank
who am I on this
who was the bearer of the voice
that swished between
and called

a call that we could only hear
when he was no longer
to be seen

what kind of water
is this
that wets our feet and sings?
the smile that we can translate
in a thousand ways

the sun rises
the sun sets
and us
rooted in terra firma
throwing the tightrope from one to another
a sling of triangulation
to measure
unknown land

The Language of Silence

shedding words
like a serpent's skin
until you reach the language of silence

silence
of the wild
its signals gleaming
when the night is at its darkest

a Milky Way above
another one on naked earth

– but who has lit the dark
who has sent the wandering light across

the rocket among the stars

you
or I?

and in what life?

*

I’ve raised my drawbridges
and yet you steal in

arches open and you
soundless weightless
come and go at ease

in order to hear and see you
I’ve borrowed sight and hearing
from eagles and owls and bats
from deep ocean fish
and creatures underground

here’s the sound of your boots in mid-day
your soft feet at night
your gloved hands
climbing up ivy-covered stones

your bare hands pushing
windows open
somewhere in my wall

*

have you seen the moon
enveloped in the shadow
of the earth

its hunger
bleeding?

have you seen the moon – muted
in the embrace of earthen love,
its growing sensuous darkness

the heart of dust under our feet
borne on silvery spider legs
in the dead of night

made visible

our human story up there
in the airy mirror
gone heavy

Madonna and Elvis*

silver birds above the city
cricket calls flooding the air

Madonna and Elvis, the homeless teenagers
their skin luminous under tatters
their eyes shimmering in the translucent
mid-summer darkness of Bucharest

just the two of them, hovering between
a parked Chrysler
and the statue of a Founding Father
with his court of reclining nymphs

the night’s whispers
won’t surrender to words

what might have been
falls behind
shredded under the late
unhurried swish of wheels
driving home

*The protagonists of Saviana Stănescu’s play Aurolac Blues.

*

Let’s go to the warm empty nest
of my fortress in the Carpathians
and eat the heart of flowers and leaves
that children once knew to be good
and click flints at one another
and shout our names and get the echo back
from the Big Gate
and you telling me stories
of dark-haired barbarians
of Turks and Greeks
and founding fathers

Let’s go to my fortress
in the Carpathians
let’s roll downhill to the sweet grass
into the shadow of the rose hedges
that Sleeping Beauty has left behind

Whirlwind

whirlwind
touching another whirlwind
clashing savage and tender

having come from afar
to either side of a screen
thinner than the wing of a butterfly

Seagull

then there was this singular shriek of a seagull
in the dead of night
piercing into the depths of sleep

what sea has it come from
above our homes on land?
what sea is it flying to?

what is in us that we do not know of
but it can recognize

and pauses
in its passage

and calls?

*

laugh, yes, laugh and spin away
in the freshly mown hay

in the haze of the moon
touched by your gaze
from the Other Side

laughter – shared like bread
a replacement of the self

which of course is blind
and thus it can see
what is invisible
otherwise

how else could I so laugh
and feel these things belong
unfold and swerve
in waves, in dancing lace
from your mountain to mine

from your mountain
to mine

Words Torn Off

stark
hunger
the one that drives continents into water
stars into one another
us into waves
that clash in amazement and mingle
: two tall flocks of birds
two golden clouds of minnows

words torn off with dust and pebbles
and burning twigs
words
and their cosmic pulse – and you reel
as if a pomegranate had burst in your face
and ruby seeds have blinded you

Here and in the Mirror

trying to utter the lightest words
to be imagined

dandelion seeds, the same
that would glide
into your landscape
and mine

here
and in the mirror

now
and in some other season

Silence

silence
shimmering with the embers
of unspoken words

silence
molding the air like clay

silence that touches
with the clarity of its language,
with its glow
under the skin

your silence
stronger than the noisy city
that I am crossing today

Mist at Dawn

luminous mist at dawn
unwrapped from my body
while I am still half-asleep

sailing
unaware
floating free towards you

freedom to follow the invisible
pull of sky and earth
as birds do

birds
who know about these things

*

we have lived all of it – and none
on a threshold on a window sill
in a mirror and on its reverse
on either side of a continent
of a curtain of a sea of a screen

we have been sending words and silences
to one another
they travel to the sky and come back on earth
they have bloomed into airy concatenations
whose roots have been lost

now they are everywhere
mute waves of darkness
showers of stars

we have lived all of it
but all is out there – yet to be lived

here we are, like the Little Prince
in a non-Euclidean realm
we can watch sunset and sunrise
whenever we wish

Defying Gravity

defying
gravity

in words

when even the words
are sometimes too heavy

words, yet, swift and airy
as one Rilke was able
to shape and distill
from his own earthen language
in the tall flame of absence

but then, what words
for the touch indeed
of one another,
of our dust, the heavy matter
alive in the lightning
that flares up
burning the distance

A Hundred Hues

a hundred hues and ripples
that your silence sends this way

a bandanna around my head
a belt around my waist

the motionless backdrop, a field
of Byzantine gold

*

how could I have ever made you hungry
had that hunger not been in you

how could you have even seen me
had I not already been
cell by cell
in you

how could I have ever been
so drunken with you without even
having touched the drink
had your elixir not been in me
worlds before

how can these ponderous bodies of ours
and crude at times
become radiant and immaterial
lighter
than a fleeting thought

if we were not the ones we are
without knowing
from times forgotten long since

Tattoos

why waste time
and not write a few lines in your palms
terzinas on your cheeks
a smiling roundelay on your lips
sonnets on your shoulders
haikus on your breast
– and you whispering your answers

then more lines reaching around –
the willow branches of a pantoum
a pair of ghazals as tasseled slippers

but if such tattoo is too pagan for us
and naïve
as late in history as this
or still too early
let’s just drape ourselves in words
– our silk and satin

Mirror Beyond

You, the wanderer the Flying Visitor
the hunter the fugitive the warrior
the sailor the Barbarian
the cowboy who can draw your pistol
and fire in a split second

you who blind me
with the flash of a mirror
from beyond

who fill the air with arrows
dipped in the moment's
thirst and hunger

who breathe over me
earliest in the morning
and follow me into my sleep

you
who want it all –
the durable and the transient

the unconquerable Now
its innocent cruelty
and its armistice

mountain after mountain
one horizon after another
on a tightrope
and the arrival postponed

To Be Your Odalisque

to be your odalisque in one of these lives
and dance for you
and play the tanbur and the cither

being for you enraptured
in self-abandonment and bliss
as an ancient Sufi mode describes it

we have lost that language
though we still find it in books,
somebody has made us for that joy
– some of it is still here
in spite of us having bitten
the forbidden fruit

to be as blissful as children
as able of self-abandonment as they are

to be enraptured, as we ourselves can be
today

The Awakening Self

I wish I could descend down silk and velvet ropes
into the depths of your sleep

the way you swing under the late stars
and the waning moon
deep down into my sleep

finding your way under the night's
closed eyelids
as silky as a bat's wings

this
radiance

this radiant whole.ness
of the awakening self

*

how many words are too many
how few are too few
how much silence is warm nearness
how much of it – desert land

how many kisses would be too many
how is it
without

how could we find the golden mean
when I the unknown am facing
you the unknown
and stories tend to fill the territory
– if they are allowed

words can absorb so much
for us they should absorb it all
for in words we trust

how many words then are too many
how few are too few

will we ever be wise enough to know

Slow Quickness

suddenly I need to find you
and I do not know how to do that
where

the paths across land and water
teasing

hidden and mute

Time revolves
with its slow quickness
quick
slowness

grain of sand upon grain

until I happen
just happen
to remember
myself

and there
you are

Inevitability

we are real
we are imaginary

we are these tough earthen things
these awkward earth-bound angels

a rugged rhyme
alive and hungry
a caduceus in a dream

inventing
one another

this inevitability

*

Hypnotic days
hypnotic nights
our bodies have burnt
all clothes
and several lives

we are
as hungry as the world
as old
as young

our bodies
two motionless stones
in a mountain river

Infallible Words

words
and their season of innocence

when they are infallible
like sprouting seeds
like wings in the air

like bare feet
on bare ground
running

*

if you were here
and borders far
I am afraid
the slightest breath of wind
would make us fail
and fall
and blindly mingle
not knowing borders
none to tell
– not even
sky from earth
or thou from I
or fact from fiction

As Atoms Split

as atoms split
and split once more
in windy gardens
and find themselves again
and swirl and then break up
and still keep gliding

the dance
imprinted in us

Locked in Letters and Tendrils

read these lines
slowly

let them blow your foliage apart
find your forsaken paths
arrest you
in the whisper of the story before story

cover your feet like freshly mown grass
like the fresh foam of milk
in the dim light
before daybreak

do read
these lines
slowly
locked in their letters and tendrils

as if
an embrace

Church on Wheels

here I am, carrying again
my folding altar along
as Romanian farmers used to
when they mounted their wooden churches
like carts on wheels
and voided the land
fled from barbarian invasions
up the mountains

The Way We Are

as elusive
as unstoppable
as the Heraclitean wave
around a jug
with the dark void at its core

*

who cares that it has been there
before us
and will be there after, like the curvature
of the Universe

who cares
that our thoughts and laughter
and the whole of us
are probably
just fuel
for it all

who cares, on this beautiful day
when I’ve suddenly remembered
you asking once
“where is my poem for today?”

your smile
tout attendrissant
on this
pirouetting
day

Braşov, Kronstadt

the Cathedral of Braşov, Kronstadt
in the fold of my Carpathian, early Sunday morning
the organ resounds under locked doors
inside Gothic walls like mountains
– there's no way in

two flocks of birds, two splendid mobile sculptures above
merging, swerving asunder
approaching one another again
in their sky-drunken motion

I stay glued to the Portal to capture the faint sound within
then I look for some smaller door between the Gothic ribs
somewhere closer to its heart

there – a deep-set little door, I lean against it
its ancient oak carved all around:
the big serpent biting its tail, beasts, men and branches
feeding on one another – like in the Book of Kells,
in the Scriptures and stones all over the continent

death feeding on life
and the other way round

Beauty
and Hunger
dreamily carved by a Saxon craftsman
once

and the sound of the organ today
the sound of Love locked inside

this one mirror, my skin and the wood and stone
that I am leaning against
sunrays carved in the middle

this mirror of words
trying to speak
about the unspeakable

One Season

cherry blossoms
have opened up overnight
can you hear them ?

apples keep falling in the grass
we can feel their thud
in our innermost self

chestnut blooms like Christmas candles
have just emerged – their lush islands
in the rich old foliage rusty and golden

– this season in us –

newborn leaves
gleaming
among the seeds afloat in the air

masses of poplar seeds
rolling like grandmother's wool
when she prepared it for spinning

*

no distance
for your words

a breath a voice a presence a force
coming straight
reassured

touching my nakedness
under my clothes

Refresh the Button

sunflower without a sun
arrow without an arch

a wedding picture taken
long after

the bride's bouquet of paper flowers
bodies
grown out of their Sunday clothes

Things to Read

I’ve been trying to read about you in the sunset embers
in my city’s motorcycle frenzy at midnight
in the rust of this scaffold across the street
in my sudden joy
under the golden summer rain,
in the warm snow that has fallen on the first cherry blossoms,
in the swarm of little winged creatures drunken with the light on my desk,
on the map of wine that’s dried out in the glass,
in our own words fallen like crumbs on the trails of the moon,
in the noise of homeless children by the non-stop Angst store downstairs,
in coffee grinds, of course, in the cowry shell of heart and hearing –
all these things
that speak in your voice

wrapped in your tune as I am
like Cleopatra in the carpet
Maenad in a veil

I looked
and your eyes have looked back at me
from the mirror

now I’ve broken the mirror
and I see you
thousandfold

Going on Tiptoe

going on tiptoe
sending ripples
across

carrying water on my head
as women used to
leaving traces on timeless trails
in the dust of our ancient lands

holding back my hem
my breath
my thoughts
and their shades

crossing over

hoping you wouldn't know

Tired and Tender

tired and tender
I'd like to rest my hands in yours

I'd like to lean my face against yours
in deep silence

the light of golden leaves underfoot

the shy nakedness of a tree
enveloped in pure blue

Leaves Lives Counterpoints

wading in layers of past year's leaves lives
lived or not
– bitter-sweet incompleteness hunting
haunting

a stone sinking into the ocean of light
motionless in the frozen river
a coin gleaming on sealed lips

a song
held captive in the mouth
that unsettles the hour
the walls of matter all transparent

what words have been hushed in the silence?

the attic of memory the cellar of childhood
beams running into darkness
coming back
and nearer
a motion of the heart

no louder than the earth that we tread on
than the motion of evening clouds

than the flutter of this leaf free
in its fall
a wandering flame

*

let me embrace you, soft and muted
as the bell embraces its sound
as the twilight,
the hour of silent prayer
envelops the land

do embrace me
like a bell that wraps its sound
in layers of silver, brass and gold

in the ember nest
of this twilight

this twilight
golden and warm

Otava

the lush silky grass after mowing, the otava
grows at our feet

radiant
curving against the ribs of light

the lesser light
beyond it
so dim to our eyes

The Lens of a Flame

but what are we?
we who have found
the void in the golden middle
and wildfire at the core

and at the crossroads – no good choice,
like in that old Romanian fairytale

pebbles struck in the dark
kindled the fire
– here, the scent of fire in our palms

are we then dragons
wolves
salamanders
who have fed on words of fire
and have opened a thousand eyes

yet there's only one way given
for us to see

through a lens, the flame
rugged and silky
that envelops us